

52 COMMENTARY ON MACAULAY'S
HISTORY

of all the Highlanders, the Macdonalds of
Glencoe had the
least productive soil, and the most convenient
and secure
den of robbers.¹

No one will dispute the vividness of this
description, but
several critics have denied its truth.²
Macaulay, they say,
in his account of the massacre, colours or mis-
states cer-
tain material facts in order to exculpate
William III at the
expense of his instruments. And they argue
that Mac-
aulay heightens and exaggerates the
barrenness and wild-
ness of Glencoe in order to prove that its
inhabitants must
have been thieves. They quote an
eighteenth-century
writer who describes the valley as warm and
fertile, full of
singing birds and roes : ' it was always
accounted (for its
narrow bounds) a place of great plenty and
security/³

Mr. Andrew Lang is particularly indignant.

It is intensely interesting and quite
inexact.^c In the
Gaelic tongue, Glencoe signifies the Glen of
Weeping/

It signifies nothing of the sort. It is ' the
very valley of
the Shadow of Death '. It ought to be, but it is
nothing of
the kind. ' Mist and storms brood over it
through the
greater part of the finest summer! ' As a fact,
the stream
(the Coe) is usually almost as clear as a chalk
stream.

Through months of sunny days you see the
sluggish salmon
sheltering under the rocks at a depth of ten or
twelve feet.
The water is so transparent that you can
watch their white
lips lazily nibble at a worm if you descend to
bait fishing.

The stream ' issues from the most sullen and gloomy mountain pools'. In fact, it passes through a shallow reed-fringed lochan, full of tiny yellow trout; it is more like ' casual water ' on the links after a wet day than a sullen and gloomy mountain pool'.⁴

¹v, 2146-7 (xviii).

²John Paget, *New Examen*, in *Paradoxes and Puzzles* (1874), pp. 38-42.

³Mrs. Grant of Laggan, writing in 1773.

* *Morning Post*, Aug. 3, 1906.